

Comment by Frank Schorkopf

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Being asked to comment on von Bogdandy's and Ioannidis' proposal „New Forces for Greek State Reform“, I discussed the topic with a Greek friend, out of known reasons member of the diaspora, to square the authors' double expertise. Here are my externally seconded thoughts: Indeed, Greece has deficiencies concerning its administrative state, since many years if not decades, as we can learn from ECJ judgments and infringement procedures. In fact, Greece became a member of the European Communities in 1981 in order to strengthen and stabilise the then newly re-established liberal democracy. Certainly, the authors' are right in pointing to the imperative of a broader understanding of „reform“, that should encompass not only the reduction of salaries and pensions, but additionally and foremost the establishment of a modern administrative state.

The authors diagnose a structural deficit of the rule-of-law thereby invoking a concept that supports if not requires the benevolent intervention by the European Union. Their proposal to make available up to 1000 key positions in central institutions to highly qualified citizens of the Greek diaspora is based on the idea that the administration can be equipped with a new programme, a kind of re-programming top-down of administrative practices and professional self-understanding. But, is the current failure caused by a rather small elite of senior civil servants in key positions? Is the Greek diaspora able to gain loyalty of the lower ranks, to shape, advance and implement institutional reforms?

The Greek diaspora as such does not have a superior ethos compared with Greeks at home. Greek citizens in Boston, Sydney, Brussels or Stuttgart are Democrats as are their fellow citizens in Athens or Salonica. Moreover, it needs further substantiation that Greeks abroad epitomise a Greek brain drain – certainly those who life and work elsewhere are qualified and have the resources to become a member of the diaspora. Not necessarily, however, the Greek diaspora is the indirect evidence for the mediocrity of the remainders still in Greece. And finally, why should an educated and well qualified civil servant in Greece, currently rewarded with 800,-- Euro per month and low expectations for a career, accept the external control by elites from the Greek diaspora, having a comparable education but a European Union salary?

The authors' proposal is based on a strong belief in administrative hierarchy and the capabilities of mandarins being recruited from the green and pleasant shores of the industrialised liberal democracies. It seems to me that the proposal, probably due to its technocratic fabric, does not address the most important question of political and democratic implications. The administrative state needs legitimacy and is – especially at the high ranks of „key positions“ – interconnected with politics. The Greek passport of ex-patriat mandarins is no guarantee for acceptance and against the allegation to implement a kind of modern administrative occupation.

Is there any alternative? If the administrative state is the key problem for Greece's recovery and if Greece at the moment is in a status of „administrative necessity“, politics may from the bottom up consider to seize drastic measures to shut down administrative and judicial units completely. In a second step, those units have to be rebuild from scratch handpicking all ranks of civil servants in a special procedure, the administrative personnel left over and on the public payroll meanwhile is being allocated to a recruitment pool without function. The European Union and its Member States can support this refiguration with expertise and funds.